



Coexisting with Coyotes

The sound of a coyote howl echoing in the darkness or a quick glimpse of a coyote as it pounces on mice in a field can create strong reactions in different people. The range of these is broad: from awe, excitement, and appreciation to fear, anger, and uncertainty. The coyote is revered by American Indians who tell tales of this creature as the Supreme Being, noted for its intelligence and trickiness. It is maligned by sheep ranchers who suffer losses when coyote prey on livestock. It is tolerated by other farmers who benefit from reduced rodent populations. Some people admire the coyote for its ability to adapt and thrive despite decades of extensive hunting and population control. Originally native to the desert and great plains, the coyote has dispersed across the continent, gaining attention in new communities.



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Coyote Characteristics



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Many behaviors exhibited by coyotes are precisely what has allowed them to exist in areas as diverse as Yellowstone National Park, Los Angeles, Central Park in New York, and Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP). They are generally elusive and many people who observe them get no more than a glimpse in their headlights as a coyote crosses their path. Coyotes are also primarily nocturnal, with peak activity occurring at dusk and dawn, thereby avoiding interactions with people. Observations suggest that as coyotes become accustomed to humans, daytime activity is increasing.

In Ohio, coyotes live in a social unit made up of an adult pair and their young. They do not form packs beyond this social unit. Coyotes will defend territory against intruding coyotes, foxes, and dogs. Coyotes use a variety of vocalizations to communicate with one another. Howls, yelps, barks, growls, and squeals are common. Coyotes are most often heard around dawn and dusk, but external triggers such as train whistles and emergency vehicle sirens may generate a response.

Is it a coyote or a dog? When spotting an animal in the distance take note of the following key identifiers. Coyotes have an elongated snout and dark fur on their lower forelegs. They travel with their bushy, black-tipped tail pointed down, while dogs carry their tail out or curled up over their

back. Unlike dogs which often meander, coyotes tend to travel a straight path. If you see tracks, note the coyote’s perfect step pattern, dropping its hind paw in the track left by the front paw.



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Fast Facts

Activity:	Primarily from dusk to dawn
Color:	Varies from pale yellowish grey to reddish to almost black
Size:	About 1 - 2 feet high at shoulder; 3 - 4 feet long plus tail
Weight:	25 - 45 pounds
Habitat:	Woods, old fields, brushy hill areas
Diet:	Mice, rabbits, other small animals, carrion, fruit, and trash
Mating:	January through April
Gestation:	58 - 63 days
Litter Size:	5 - 7 pups
Scat:	Similar to dog scat but contains hair and can appear chalky



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Coyotes and People



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Coyotes do pose some risk to small pets. This risk can increase in winter months when significant snow cover makes small rodents more difficult for coyotes to hunt. Although very rare, coyote have also been known to bite humans. Frequency of coyote conflicts with both pets and humans often intensifies in April and May when adult coyotes are protecting their young.

Like any warm-blooded animal, coyotes can contract rabies, but this is uncommon in Ohio. Coyotes are susceptible to several rabies strains including a raccoon-strain rabies that spread to Northeast Ohio several years

ago. Since 2004, CVNP has cooperated with the Ohio Departments of Health, Agriculture, and Natural Resources to allow distribution of oral rabies vaccine (ORV) baits within the park in an effort to stop further spread of rabies in the region. The ORV is masked by fishmeal and oil that is eaten by raccoons (the primary target), thereby vaccinating them. ORV baits have also been shown to be eaten by coyote and fox.

The key element in preventing conflicts with coyotes is to prevent them from becoming habituated to people and to avoid having them identify humans as potential suppliers of food.

Tips for Homeowners



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- Remove potential food sources from your yard such as pet food, garbage, birdseed, or exposed compost.
- Regularly clean outdoor grills.
- Accompany small pets and children while outside and keep cats indoors.

- Deter nuisance coyotes from your property by making loud noises, throwing rocks, or spraying them with a garden hose.

Tips for Park Visitors

- Treat coyotes and all wildlife with respect.
- Keep dogs on leash.
- Do not approach coyotes or other wildlife.



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Coyotes in CVNP

Coyotes are currently found throughout the United States, but prior to 1900 their numbers were sparse in the East. Beginning with Ohio’s first coyote sighting in 1919, coyotes have gradually spread throughout the state and inhabit all 88 counties.



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Shortly after staff and visitors in CVNP began sighting coyotes, the park began a survey to determine the overall population and monitor changes. Beginning in 1993, the park has estimated this population by playing recorded coyote calls to elicit a response from other coyotes. This study method has revealed that after an initial increase, CVNP’s coyote population has stabilized at about 60 to 100 individuals. Partnerships with local universities occasionally result in other coyote research occurring within the park.

To learn more, attend a CVNP coyote program listed in the park’s *Schedule of Events*, available at visitor centers or online at the websites below. These programs usually take place in November.



Cuyahoga Valley
National Park

www.nps.gov/cuva
www.dayinthevalley.com